

Senator Barrasso's Floor Statement on the CIA Center on Climate Change and National Security:

October 1, 2009

Mr. President, on September 25 the Central Intelligence Agency announced the creation of the CIA Center on Climate Change and National Security. I am proposing an amendment today to the fiscal year 2010 Defense appropriations bill that would prevent funds in this bill from going to that center.

The CIA is responsible for gathering foreign intelligence information for the United States. We have threats from around the world. The most immediate of these threats is the prevention of future terrorist attacks on U.S. soil. I do not believe that creating a Center on Climate Change is going to prevent one terrorist attack.

Why is this administration having our intelligence officials, the men and the women who protect this country, have these men and women staff and operate a climate change center? The creation of this center appears to elevate the issue of climate change to the level of terrorism and foreign espionage.

To me, this raises a number of questions. The CIA always claims to have scarce resources and competing priorities. What are the costs going to be of creating this new climate center? Isn't there a more efficient way to achieve the same results using existing resources? Why can't the CIA get this information through traditional channels, such as the State Department officials in the field, the EPA, the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration, and other Federal agencies?

How does the CIA get information about other issues--world hunger, disease, financial markets--to make their decisions? Do they have centers for all of these issues as well? Is this center going to make demands on the current CIA bureaucracy? Will they use existing personnel? Will they hire new people? Will necessary personnel have tasking authority?

Tasking authority means the ability to take satellites off of watching terrorists and having them instead watching arctic ice sheets. Will someone sitting in a dark room watching satellite video of northern Afghanistan now be sitting in a dark room watching polar ice caps?

The priorities seem to be out of focus. I believe the Senate should support this amendment and bring the focus back in line with America's national security interests. The CIA has an important job to do. It must not be distracted by being forced to deal with climate change.